Theory, evidence and engineering for police practice.

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PART 1: THEORY
The need for tested theory

a. Police practice is washed through with theory
b. The theories embedded in policing are fallible
c. It is useful and informative to ‘surface’ police theories
d. In common with many others the police can resist rigorous testing of their own theories
e. To improve policing better theory needs to displace worse theory
f. Better theory requires detailed and critical attention to it and its application
g. Mutual respect is needed if universities are to play a significant part in improving working police theory
PART 2: EVIDENCE
Evidence wants: effect sizes and costs

• Wants
  – What works?
  – At what cost?
  – No theory!

• What wants won’t wash
  – Nothing works unconditionally
  – The what of what works is often unclear
  – All trials are confined by place and time
  – Decisions have to be made in new situations
Evidence needs: EMMIE

- **E**ffects found from robust research (intended and unintended)
- **M**echanisms activated to produce outcomes
- **M**ediators (or contexts) for activation of mechanisms
- **I**mplementation hurdles and needs
- **E**conomic consequences
References


PART 3: ENGINEERING
Engineering

• Involves problem-solving in new situations
  – E.g. fly to the moon!
• Uses tested theory to produce reliable outcomes
  – E.g. aerodynamics
• Includes creativity, building on past achievements
  – E.g. Dyson and vacuum cleaners
• Has to adapt and adjust in light of experience
  – E.g. building skyscrapers
• Is fallible, but learns from mistakes
  – E.g. De Havilland Comet crashes
• Has improved effectiveness & efficiency over time
  – E.g. aircraft
Policing and crime prevention

- Involves problem-solving in new situations?
- Uses tested theory to produce reliable outcomes?
- Includes creativity?
- Adapts and adjusts in light of experience?
- Embraces fallibility, learning from mistakes?
- Has improved effectiveness and efficiency over time?
Theory, evidence and engineering

- Policing depends on theory, even when it is unstated
  - Flawed theory will lead to flawed practice
- Evidence is needed to test theory
- Evidence is needed to inform choices of strategy
- Evidence needs to be EMMIE focused
  - EMMIE focused evidence speaks to theory
  - EMMIE focused evidence also speaks to intervention outcomes
- Engineering is worth emulating in policing and research
  - It is pragmatic
  - It uses theory and develops theory
  - It attends to outcome effectiveness,
  - It speaks to real problems
  - It has achieved cumulative successes.
References


